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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

MAY 1st, 1863.

ESSAY ON MUSIC.

From the 'Penny Cyclopædia.'

MUSIC (*Musique*, Fr.; *Musica*, Lat.; *Μουσική*, Gr., from *μοῦσα*, a *muse* or *song*) is the artistic union of inarticulate sounds and rhythm, exciting agreeable sensations, and raising mental images and emotions directly or indirectly pleasing. Such is pure unmixed music. When conjoined to poetry, it is an art not of diminished importance, but of a dependent nature, its office then being to enforce the meaning of the words and add a colouring to them. As an adjunct it is a beautiful illustration of language; combined with the sister art, it becomes a highly ornamented kind of eloquence. Hence it will be seen that we widely differ from one who has been looked up to as an unquestionable authority, from the celebrated Rousseau, whose well-known definition of music—'l'art de combiner des sons d'une manière agréable à l'oreille' (*the art of combining sounds in a manner agreeable to the ear*)—has been so generally received, and even adopted by those whose capacities and knowledge might have enabled them to take a much more enlarged view of the subject. One very learned Frenchman, however, has repudiated the degrading description given by his distinguished countryman: M. Villoteau stamps it with the epithets insignificant and vulgar, considering it absurd and puerile; for with as much propriety might oratory be described as *the art of combining words in a manner agreeable to the ear*, or painting as *the art of combining colours in a manner agreeable to the eye*.

Music is a kind of language, and as such, says Metastasio, it possesses that advantage over poetry which a universal language has over a particular one; for this last speaks only to its own age and country; the other speaks to all ages and countries. James Harris, in his philosophical *Discourse on Music, Painting, and Poetry*, expresses the same opinion, even going to the length of asserting, that while a description in words has rarely any relation to the several ideas of which those words are the symbols, 'musical imitations are intelligible to all men.' Music is a language that speaks by imitating, and as such it is understood by those who have successfully studied the art, and likewise by mere amateurs, who, with little if any knowledge of its principles, have learnt the meaning of its expressions by long practice, by frequently hearing and enjoying its performance; but it can only express passion and sentiment very generally, and commonly fails when it attempts to particularise. This want of absolute decision in what is called musical language is by some writers

reckoned among its advantages, because it gives the hearer great latitude in interpreting it, which he usually does in a manner as congenial as possible to his own feelings at the time. Madame de Staël goes so far as to prefer instrumental to vocal music, on account of the *vagueness* which she thinks one of the attributes of the former—that very same vagueness which Fontenelle meant to impute to it as an egregious fault, when, in a transport of impatience, he exclaimed, '*Sonate, que me veux tu?*' Burkes's opinion however coincides with Madame de Staël's, if it did not actually prompt it. He says 'the passions may be considerably operated upon, without presenting any image at all, by certain sounds adapted to that purpose, of which we have a sufficient proof in the acknowledged and powerful effects of instrumental music.' He however soon afterwards adds, that 'in reality a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasm whatever.' This is rather startling as a general proposition: if we admit it as applied to vocal music, we must, *à fortiori*, allow that the finest compositions of that kind, which certainly leave nothing to the imagination of the hearer, exercise little if any influence over the passions. But being decidedly opposed to such an opinion, we must condemn it, though advanced by the eminent writer of the *Enquiry concerning the Sublime and Beautiful*, and supported by the distinguished author of *Allemagne*. No one has written in a more enthusiastic strain on the power of music in imitating than Rousseau. The reader of the article 'Imitation,' in his Dictionary, will find little difficulty in believing all that is said of Orpheus and Amphion, if he suffers himself to be convinced by the florid, declamatory, extravagant passage to which we allude. The writer of the first *Bridgewater Treatise*, Dr Chalmers, has argued no less earnestly in favour of that musical language of which we are speaking. 'Music,' he says, 'apart from words, is powerfully fitted both to represent and awaken the mental processes, inasmuch that, without the aid of spoken characters, many a story of deepest interest is most impressively told, many a noble or tender sentiment is most emphatically conveyed by it. . . . The power and expressiveness of music may well be regarded as a most beautiful adaptation of external nature to the moral constitution of man. . . . Its sweetest sounds are those of kind affection: its sublimest sounds are those most expressive of moral heroism, or most fitted to prompt the aspirations and resolves of exalted piety.' Fontenelle, on one side, and Rousseau, with Dr Chalmers, on the other, are at the two extremes on this question: the one, from a deficiency of musical feeling, granting too little; the others, from an excess of it, admitting too much.

A musical sound,—which is a curious com-

pound of other sounds, called harmonics, resulting from a number of vibrations in equal times,—when produced by a fine voice, a rich-toned violoncello, or a ‘mellow horn,’ excites in all who possess a moderate share of nervous sensibility, a pleasurable sensation; and this, Sir John Herschel observes, ‘is perhaps the only instance of a sensation for whose pleasing impression a distinct and intelligible reason can be assigned.’

Dr. Beattie does not think it absurd to suppose that the body may be mechanically affected by sound. ‘If,’ he says, ‘in a church one feels the floor and the pew tremble to certain tones of the organ; if one string vibrates of its own accord when another is sounded near it, of equal length, tension, and thickness; if a person speaks loud in the neighbourhood of a harpsichord, and often hears the strings of the instrument murmur in the same tone, we need not wonder that some of the finer fibres of the human frame should be put in a tremulous motion when they happen to be in unison with any notes proceeding from external objects.’ Most persons must have witnessed the effect of a street-organ on some of the canine species, apparently willing auditors, who, if not driven away, continue to howl all the while the instrument is playing. Whether they are painfully affected, and their tones those of distress, or agreeably, and they become responsive, does not appear; though if distressed, the probability is that they would fly from the cause. But Dr. Mead tells us that a celebrated violinist of his acquaintance, perceiving that his dog betrayed symptoms of great suffering on hearing a certain passage performed, repeated it for some time, in order to try the result, and the experiment proved fatal to the poor animal, who ‘dropped down at the feet of his master, where in a few seconds he died in the most horrid convulsions.’ The surprising and hitherto unexplained connection between form and vibrations producing musical sounds, so beautifully shown in Chladni’s experiments on plates of glass strewed with sand, and put into sonorous vibration, thereby throwing the sand into various symmetrical figures, may be here incidentally mentioned, though it does not now seem to shed any new light on the subject before us; nevertheless by proving something like sympathy, and of a much more extraordinary kind than that between two strings, in mere matter, it may at a future period lead to interesting discoveries.

The effect of Rhythm, or measure, is universally felt and admitted: the most polished inhabitants of Europe, and the most barbarous natives of the arctic regions, are alive to its influence; it is that which reduces unmeaning sounds to order, converts them into melody, and bestows on them proportion and a power to charm. The chirping, or whistling, or singing as it is called, of most birds, being devoid of rhythm, affords no pleasure but what is derived from association; while the single note of a drum beaten in time, combining sound and measure, is gratifying in a certain

degree to every hearer. Indeed, with the antients rhythm was of paramount importance, if not almost everything, in what they denominated music, a term under which was included much that it does not imply in modern language. Aristides Quintilianus, the best of the seven Greek writers on music collected by Meibomius, remarks that rhythm is the object of three senses, namely, the sight, as in dancing; the hearing, as in music; and the touch, as in the pulsations of the arteries.

Much of the effect of music on the mind is ascribed to Imitation, which is either direct or indirect. And it must be understood that we are still speaking of music strictly instrumental, not vocal. The power of direct imitation is confined within very narrow limits indeed, though composers have often attempted to enlarge the boundaries, exposing their own weakness and that of their art. The song of some birds, the whistling of winds, the roaring of the tempest, the sound of cannon, the ringing and tolling of bells, and perhaps the tones of the human voice expressive of certain emotions, are legitimate objects of direct imitation; but the rattling of hail, the fall of snow, the motions of animals, actions at sea, battles on land, &c., are not only unrepresentable by any kind of musical instrument at present known, but unfit for imitation if instruments could be constructed for the express purpose. Greatly we admire the introduction to the oratorio of *The Creation*, considered as a most original and ingenious composition, but cannot bring ourselves to believe that any idea of *chaos* is to be excited by exquisite harmony. Still less can we be convinced that *silence* can be imitated by sound, though the author of this musical solecism (which appears in a symphony intended to be descriptive) is a man of rare talent, whose works are highly esteemed in England, and still more so where better known, in Germany, his native country. Music can imitate in a direct manner only by its actual resemblance to the sound of the thing imitated. Of all the powers of music, in the opinion of an admirable critic, the Rev. Thos. Twining, that of raising ideas by direct resemblance is the weakest and least important. ‘It is indeed so far from being essential to the pleasure of the art, that unless used with great caution, judgment, and delicacy, it will destroy the pleasure by becoming offensive or ridiculous. The highest power of music, and that from which it derives its greatest efficacy, is undoubtedly its power of raising emotions.’

Professor Hutcheson, in the early part of the last century, expressed nearly the same opinion. What he adds concerning the imitation of the human voice and accents is entitled to particular attention. He says, ‘There is a charm in music to various persons which is distinct from the harmony occasioned by its raising agreeable passions. The human voice is obviously varied by all the stronger passions: now, when our ear

discerns any resemblance between the air of a tune, whether sung or played on an instrument, either in its time or modulation, or any other circumstance, and the sound of the human voice in any passion, we shall be touched by it in a very sensible manner, and have melancholy, joy, gravity, thoughtfulness, excited in us by a sort of sympathy or contagion.' (*Enquiry into our Ideas of Beauty, &c.*)

Plato, in the third book of his 'Republic,' speaks of a warlike air inspiring courage, because imitating the sounds and accents of the courageous man; and of a calm and sedate air producing tranquillity and gravity, on the same principle. This leads us to the consideration of indirect imitation, to which part of our subject it perhaps more properly belongs.

Indirect Imitation is that by which some quality common to music and the thing imitated is indicated by sounds, strong or weak, quick or slow. Rage is loud, anger is harsh, love and pity are gentle; therefore loud and harsh sounds raise ideas of the former passions and others of the same class; soft and tranquil sounds raise ideas of the latter and others of a similar character. Hence it will be seen, as before observed, that the hearer may interpret music in a manner corresponding in some degree to the state of mind in which it shall find him, but under certain restrictions from which he cannot be released. If agitated by any turbulent passion, he will find it impossible to convert smooth and delicate music into a language in unison with his irritated feelings; and if under the softening influence of some tender attachment, or of sorrow for the loss of one beloved or valued, he will be unable to construe bold and brilliant sounds as expressions of sympathy. But music that is not of a decided character will prove more or less convertible. And it is to this latter kind probably that Mr Twining alludes, when, speaking of good instrumental music 'expressively' performed, he says, 'the very indecision of the expression, leaving the hearer to the free operation of his emotion upon his fancy, and, as it were, to the free choice of such ideas as are to him most adapted to re-act upon and heighten the emotion which occasioned them, produces a pleasure which nobody, I believe, who is able to feel it will deny to be one of the most delicious that music is capable of affording.' (*Dissertation on the word Imitative, &c.*)

It is proper to add that this very learned and able commentator on Aristotle considers the word *imitative* inapplicable to music, and proposes instead of it the term *suggestive*. This is perhaps an amendment in the case of what we have called 'indirect imitation;' but *direct imitation* does more than *suggest* the idea; it may be said, without any violent distortion of language, to represent it.

Association, which has so large a share in the operations of the human mind, often contributes much to the effect of music. Indeed some airs

possessing no intrinsic merit owe their influence solely to this principle, and among these the famous *Rans des Vaches*, which, in times happily gone by, acted with such irresistible force on the expatriated Swiss soldier. It was many years after the battle of Culloden, and not till all fears of the Pretender had subsided, that the Scotch bagpipers ventured to play any of the Jacobite tunes, which, when revived, were heard with delight, though hardly one of them would have continued to be listened to but as connected with the history of the country. When Sir Joshua Reynolds was at Venice—we are told by Mr. Malone—in compliment to the English gentlemen then residing there, the manager of the opera one night ordered the band to play an English ballad-tune. Happening to be the popular air which was played or sung in almost every street, just at the time of their leaving London, by suggesting to them that metropolis with all its connections and endearing circumstances, it immediately brought tears into the artist's eyes, as well as into those of his countrymen who were present.' To compositions of a very ordinary kind, association, Dr. Beattie remarks, gives a significancy. 'We have heard them,' he says, 'performed, some time or other, in an agreeable place perhaps, or by an agreeable person; or have heard them in our early years, a period of life which we seldom look back upon without pleasure. Nor is it necessary that such melodies or harmonies should have much intrinsic merit. . . . If a song, or piece

of music, should call up only a faint remembrance that we were happy the last time we heard it, nothing more would be needful to make us listen to it again with peculiar satisfaction.' To this latter part, however, we can only give our assent generally: painful experience has taught many that there is an exception to the rule.' A composition which had been listened to with unalloyed pleasure when executed by one possessing all our tenderest and warmest affection, only excites the idea of lost, of irrecoverable happiness, if heard when death has deprived us of the performer who had imparted to the music its greatest charm. Except in this particular instance, we fully agree with the elegant author of *Essays on Poetry and Music*, in the preceding observations; though Boethius, in his treatise 'De Consolatione Philosophiæ,' and after him Dante, in his *Inferno*—both high authorities—express the opposite opinion, namely, that in distress and adversity the greatest misery is the recollection of former happiness. But the poetical notion of the Hindus regarding musical effect, which they strictly connect with past events, seems to us the finest that ever was conceived;—they say that it arises from our recalling to memory the airs of Paradise, heard in a state of pre-existence.

After all, however, that has been written and said, from the days of Aristotle down to the present period, of music as an imitative art, it must be conceded that modulated sounds please

by some mysterious means, many to whom they present no imitation of anything material or immaterial, and who associate with them no other idea than that of melody or of harmony. These are, probably, the persons whom Rousseau had in view when, mistaking the exception for the rule, it seems to have been his design, in one of his wayward moments, to reduce that which is at once an art and a science, to the low rank of a sensual gratification. But in justice to that eloquent writer, it should be added, that, in his *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, he at once demolishes his own definition—which, unfortunately, has been so widely circulated—by the interposition of a simple negative: e.g.—‘*La musique n'est pas l'art de combiner des sons d'une manière agréable à l'oreille.*’

Thus far our attention has been directed to instrumental music, or that which is dependent on no auxiliary for effect, on no words to explain its meaning, on no gesticulation or scenery to illustrate it. We have now to consider music as produced by the human voice in alliance with language, whether poetical or prose, and with or without instrumental accompaniment.

(To be continued.)

Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

ARDWICK.—A concert in aid of the distressed Lancashire operatives was given in the Ardwick Town Hall, on Thursday evening, March 26th, by the Choral Society. There were between thirty and forty performers. Mr. John Downs, Jun., conducted, and Mr. G. E. Broadbent presided at the pianoforte.

BELFAST.—On the 8th ult., in the Music Hall, a meeting of the United Church of England and Ireland Society was held, when various anthems and selections from the *Messiah* were sung. Mr. Carroll conductor.

BRISTOL.—A concert was given at the Victoria Rooms, on the 6th of April, by the Artillery Band, whose performance, under the direction of Herr Pfeiffer, was deserving of much praise. They were assisted in the vocal department by Miss Ada Jackson, Miss Angell, Mr. Cockram, and Mr. Merrick.—On Thursday evening, April 16th, the Rev. T. Helmore, priest in ordinary to Her Majesty's Chapel Royal, delivered an interesting lecture on Church Music, at the Athenæum. His remarks were illustrated by the performance of pieces from the works of ancient and modern composers, which were correctly and effectively rendered by the choir of St. John's, Bedminster, assisted by a few members of St. Paul's and St. Raphael's choirs, under the direction of Mr. Barrett, the organist and choir-master of St. John's, who presided at the piano.

BIRMINGHAM.—On the 9th ult. an amateur concert took place at King Edward's School, when some really good music was performed in excellent style. The Rev. J. Lunn, and Messrs. Rickard, Miller, Harrison, Heap, Carter, Austin, Bembridge, and Evans, were among the executants. The programme was chiefly instrumental, with a few choruses interspersed.

BURNESTON.—A concert was given on the 6th ult., in the School-room, by the Carthorpe Musical Society, with a miscellaneous selection of music, conducted by Mr. W. Prendergast.

CAMDEN TOWN.—The North-West London Sacred Choral Association performed the *Messiah* on Good Friday last to a crowded audience, at the Bedford New Town

School-room. Misses Carpenter, Marion, and Betjemann, and Messrs. Betjemann, Glave, and Matthews, took the solos. The choruses were given with precision and accuracy throughout by a body of 100. Mr. Carpenter conducted, and Mr. Arnold presided at the organ. Leader of the band, Mr. Woolvine.

CHELSEA.—A society has been formed in this neighbourhood for the practice of glees, madrigals, &c., under the name of the Chelsea Glee and Madrigal Society. By the permission of the incumbent, the meetings are held at the school-rooms of St. Jude's Church. The society is under the direction of Mr. W. Bridges.

CHELTHENHAM.—Costa's *Eli* was performed by the Philharmonic Society on the 11th ult. The solo parts were taken by members of the Society, assisted by Mr. Muggford. Mr. Blagrove led the orchestra, and Mr. Frederick Helmore conducted.

CITY OF LONDON COLLEGE, Leadenhall Street.—Mr. Charles Field gave an entertainment here on the 23rd ult. Miss Bennett assisted at the pianoforte, and sung two songs.

COLESHILL.—An amateur concert was given in the room provided for the Institute on the 15th ult., to obtain funds for increasing the library. The room, holding about 300, was filled. The programme was judiciously chosen, and the music well performed.

CRYSTAL PALACE.—The Directors of the Crystal Palace have issued their programme of arrangements for the tenth season, commencing on the 1st of May. It is intended to inaugurate the new season, on the 1st of May, by a great Musical Festival, which shall revive the memory of the grand choral effects produced at the Handel Festivals. On this occasion Racine's dramatic poem, *Athalie*, as set to music by Mendelssohn, is to be performed, and the Overtures composed by M. Auber and M. Meyerbeer for the opening of the International Exhibition. Among the other arrangements for the forthcoming season are the great Flower Show on Saturday, the 23rd of May, and the Rose Show on Saturday the 27th of June. On eight of the Saturdays in May, June, and July, there will be a series of Grand Concerts of a peculiarly attractive nature, and the daily performances of the Company's admirable band, under the skilful conductorship of Mr. Manns, will be continued as heretofore. Archery Fêtes will be held on Thursday and Friday, the 11th and 12th of June, and the Royal Dramatic College will again hold its popular Fête and Fancy Fair in the course of the summer.

DUBLIN.—A concert was given on March 23rd, by the Guild of St. Cecilia, in connexion with the Catholic Young Men's Society, at the Catholic Hall. The performance consisted of Haydn's "Third Mass," the solos in which were sung by Miss Cruise, Miss Dodd, Mr. Kearney, and Mr. Leahy. Mr. O'Brien accompanied on the harmonium, and Mr. Mayne conducted.—The Dublin University Choral Society gave a concert on the 23rd of April; the first part consisting of a selection from the *Messiah*, and the second of various operatic pieces, and also the "Installation Ode," composed by Dr. Steward, professor of music to the University, for the installation of the Earl of Rosse as Chancellor of the University. Vocalists, Miss Hiles, Messrs. Perren and Patey. Conductor, Dr. Steward.

DURHAM.—On Easter Sunday, at St. Cuthbert's Catholic Chapel, Henry Farmer's "Mass in B flat" was sung by the choir, with instrumental accompaniment. The solos were sung by Miss Scaife, Messrs. Taylor, Hewitt, and Roberts. Mr. J. Wood was the leader of the band, and Mr. Wetherell presided at the organ.

EASTCOMBE (near Stroud).—A new organ, built by Williams, of Cheltenham, was opened at the Baptist Chapel, on the 3rd ult. A selection of music was performed on the occasion by the choirs of the neighbourhood, directed by Mr. Chew, of Stroud. The instrument was played by Mr. Vale, of Cheltenham.